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ABSTRACT

The Protestant Ethic Scale (PES) was administered to 125 undergraduates to measure their attitudes towards hard work, industry, ambition, personal sacrifice and strength of character. Students (N=46) enrolled in Career Planning and Placement units (CPP) were hypothesized to score higher than students (N=79) not enrolled in such units. However, means for the two samples were nearly identical, while variances were significantly different, with the CPP group being much more homogeneous than the general sample. Examination of such subject variables as age, sex, ethnicity and religious affiliation revealed no differences between groups that would account for the variability. It was concluded that extreme scorers at both ends of the scale tended not to enroll in CPP units. The scale may be useful in identifying low scorers who would benefit from career planning services but are unlikely to do so without guidance. (Author)

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CAREER PLANNING AND THE PROTESTANT ETHIC

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Career Planning and Scores on the Protestant Ethic Scale

In the early 1900s Max Weber conceptualized ideal types of Protestantism and Capitalism (Weber, 1958). Using these ideal types he postulated a causal relationship between the Protestant ethic and the development of Capitalism in the West. The essential elements of the ethic are hard work, material success as an outward sign of election to a state of grace, individualism, and rejection of pleasure. These elements were seen by Weber as providing a moral justification for the accumulation of wealth.

Although debate still exists today with regard to the validity of this causal relationship, in recent years a number of attempts have been made to subject it to empirical investigation as a personality variable. Of particular relevance to this study is the development of the Protestant Tthic Scale by Mirels and Garrett (1971). The format is a 19 item Likert-type scale which purports to assess the attitudes of subjects towards hard work, industry, ambition, personal sacrifice and strength of character--consistent with the characteristics of the Protestant Ethic. Initial attempts at validation (Mirels and Garrett, 1971) have proven satisfactory, demonstrating high internal consistency, freedom from response bias, acquiescence set, and social desirability set. In addition, the original authors report a number of significant correlations between the Protestant Ethic Scale (PES) and authoritarianism as measured by the California F Scale, internal

locus of control, and specific Strong Vocational Interest Blank profiles. Good agreement on means and standard deviations has been reported over time and from a variety of geographical locations (Mirels and Garrett, 1971; MacDonald, 1972; and Dorst et al., 1978). Finally, Merrens and Garrett's (1975) investigation of the relationship between work behavior and the PES indicated that the scale was an accurate predictor of work behavior. High PES subjects had a higher level of work output on a drab task than did low PES subjects.

The research question addressed in this study is whether or not students enrolled in Career Planning and Placement Units (CPP) would obtain higher PES scores than similar students not so enrolled (NCPP). The rationale for the prediction stems from the assumption that students who display an active behavioral involvement in making career choices will have a value system that is more like the system reflected in the Protestant Ethic than will an at-large campus population, and thus a higher mean endorsement of the PES.

Method

Subjects and Procedure. Subjects for the NCPP group were 79 students from undergraduate Behavioral Science courses, majoring in a variety of academic disciplines, together with 46 undergraduate subjects enrolled in Career Planning and Placement Units (the CPP group).

The Mirels and Garrett (1971) PES was administered to each subject, followed by a questionnaire on personal background,

including age, gender, year in college, ethnic identification, reason for enrolling in the class, and religious identification.

Results

As may be seen in Table 1, contrary to prediction there as no significant difference between means for the CPP group and the NCPP group. Further, as Table 1 shows, the data for both groups are substantively similar with respect to means and to the results reported for other student populations in the United States.

Insert Table 1 about here

However, when standard deviations are examined, it is clear that the amount of variability is notably smaller for the CPP group as compared to the NCPP group and to all other samples in the table, with the CPP group having an *SD* of 10.71 and the NCPP group having an *SD* of 15.4. This difference was significant (F_{Max} (123) = 2.07, $p < .01$). It should be noted that the SD for the NCPP group is similar to that reported in previous studies, while the CPP group differs in this *and* in the rationale for subject selection, when compared with previous samples.

Given the obtained difference in variability between groups, subject variables were examined further in an attempt to isolate possible sources of this differential variability. Groups were combined and then dichotomized on age, gender, class and ethnicity, and *t* tests were done on each dichotomized

variable. No significant differences between means were found. All means were, in fact, in remarkably close agreement as can be seen in Table 2.

Insert Table 2 about here

A similar analysis was performed on the variables shown in Table 2 for the CPP and NCPP groups separately. Again, no significant differences were found.

Given the religious origin of the Protestant Ethic concept, a separate analysis was performed on the religious affiliation variable. The principle finding was a significant difference in PES scores for Catholics and Protestants in the combined groups ($\underline{t}(85) = 2.61$, $\underline{p} < .02$) with the Catholics in this combined sample having a mean of 78.9 and Protestants a mean of 86.7.

The Catholic/Protestant dimension was further examined within CPP and NCPP groups separately. PES scores for Catholics vs. Protestants did not significantly differ within the CPP group alone, but PES scores did differ significantly in the NCPP group, with Catholics obtaining a PES mean of 77.5 and Protestants a PES mean of 87.0 ($\underline{t}(53) = 2.29$, $\underline{p} < .05$). The Variances were similar in both CPP and NCPP groups for Catholics, but for Protestants, significantly greater variability was found in the NCPP group (F_{Max} (41) = 2.83, $p < .01$) when compared with the CPP group.

Discussion

Although clearly of interest in their own right, the findings on religious affiliation and PES scores do not explain

the difference in variability found between the CPP and NCPP groups, and as noted, there were no significant differences on any of the other subject variables examined.

Given nearly identical means for the CPP and NCPP groups, and a lack of extreme PES scores at both ends of the scale for CPP subjects, the most reasonable explanation for the findings would not appear to be related to any of the subject variables examined, but rather to a curvilinear relationship between participation in Career Planning and Placement Units and PES scores. The data are persuasive that very high scorers, who, in all probability set their own career goals, are less likely to use CPP units, while very low scorers, who might be assumed on this basis to be weak in career motivation, are also less likely to use CPP services.

This has positive implications for the use of the PES as a screening instrument in educational and vocational advisement. If, for example, a low PES score <u>is</u> indicative of a weak or unfocused orientation to the work sphere, the scale may provide a brief and simple way to detect this and offer appropriate guidance.

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Table 1

PES Means and Standard Deviations by year of study:

US Subjects

			Mean	SD	N
1971	(Mirels and Garrett)	Males	85.7	15.5	54
		Females	85.5	16.2	55
1975	(Merrens and Garrett)		86.6	13.6	333
1978	(Dorst, Leon & Philbrick)	Cal Poly	81.3	14.6	126
		Ariz St.	79.0	15.1	184
		U. Hawaii	82.3	14.6	63
		New Mex.	86.3	15.5	92
1979	(Harkey, Leon, Mancuso & Philbrick	CPP	83.4	10.7	46
		NCPP	82.8	15.4	79

Table 2

PES Means and SD by Gender, Class, Ethnicity and Age: Present Study

	Mean	SD	N
Gender			
Male	84.3	13.1	40
Female	82.5	14.2	85
Class			
Frosh, Soph	82.9	13.1	102
Junior, Senior	83.6	17.0	23
Ethnicity			
White	83.0	13.7	85
Non-white	83.1	14.2	40
Age			
21 and under	82.3	13.3	101
Over 21	82.0	15.0	24